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ABSTRACT

The assumption that humanistic scholarship possesses intrinsic value in and of itself as "scholarship" pervades the academic community, though it is largely unspoken. Untenured faculty members rush to publish research, regardless of whether it is read or applied, because they distrust connecting scholarship with action. Academics confuse the worthwhile ideal of scholarly detachment with the false idol of scholarly neutrality. Professional associations, learned societies, and graduate departments can remedy this by breaking the often automatic connection of mature scholarship with university teaching. They can show their care for scholarship by encouraging an end to the "publish or perish" syndrome and with more discriminate attention to scholarly journals. Scholarship has real value only when it receives application. Carefully considering ways to help the growing number of scholars working outside the academic world will begin to restore to humanism its vital association with actual living. (HTH)

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BEYOND THE ENCLAVE: PROFESSIONAL HUMANISM AND THE "REAL WORLD"

Kathleen Spaltro

Professional associations, like people, reveal their worth, or lack of it, in a crisis. Since the crisis of humanistic scholarship has endured so long now that it has become domesticated into tedium, graduate scholars begin to question the worth of their professional societies. Those associations, in the main, are more aware of the dimness of employment prospects than are most of the ^{senior} faculty they represent. They have tried to deal with unemployment as best they know how. The major defect in their trying has been their unconscious clinging to the customs of the past. When the professional societies continue to link humanistic scholarship to university teaching careers, and when they continue to pressure those intent upon such careers to publish promiscuously, they blindly persist in old paths. Three-quarters of the resistance to alternative employment on the part of graduate students comes from the stubborn belief that, once people teach no more, they write no longer. Not only does this ignore the fact that the present arrangement is only a recent one and not a fact of nature, but it fosters more of the same kind of scholarship produced in such abundance over the last few years--scholarship proud of its isolation from eventual action.

Though humanists have convinced themselves of the importance of their own scholarship, their scholarship has remained important largely to themselves. And humanists seem content to have it so. The widespread, if largely unspoken, assumption that scholarship possesses an intrinsic

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value in and of itself--as scholarship--pervades the academic community. The proliferation of journals, the maddened rush by the untenured to amass several articles per year as evidence of their worth. the bulging bibliographies on every conceivable subject, all witness to this. The mere publication of research, whether applied by anyone or even read, is in itself enough; it needs no justification. If some scholars are aware of the speciousness of this view, they content their consciences with the vague notion that someone, somehow, will apply the conclusions of research to actual living and doing. But they cannot explain just how this will happen. For the academic profession, unlike its sister professions of theology, law, and medicine, abhors practice. By elevating a false ideal of scholarly neutrality, and by insisting upon the necessary linkage of scholarship with university teaching, professional humanism divorces thought from action. And who is there to repair the breakage? Who, outside the academy, reads or is likely to read humanistic scholarship? Are not "outsiders" more likely to believe, with humanists, that such scholarship does not connect at all with action?

Academics distrust connecting scholarship with action because they confuse the worthwhile ideal of scholarly detachment with the false idol of scholarly neutrality.¹ A dispassionate and fairminded attitude towards the facts, a necessary scepticism about one's own enthusiasms, are the companions of good research and writing. But even these very hard virtues cannot result in a "value-free" article or book. Scholars remain men and women, even in the library--men and women with passions, convictions, prejudices, blindnesses, ideals. The work they produce

in an effort at scholarly detachment exalts the values they exalt and derides the values they deny. The work is never neutral. And, as humanistic scholarship condemns or applauds human conduct, and scoffs at or insists upon human choice, it implies guidelines for future action.

Academics are only able to deny the natural connection between thought and consequent action by claiming a false neutrality. But "neutral" thought, thinking without reference to action, is futile and even laughable. By claiming neutrality, the mind denies that it has a body to direct.

The university provides a haven for minds intent upon inaction. There exists no compulsion there to link scholarly research with necessary action. Men can evade that linkage in the enclave of the academy. And scholars do evade it there, because they fear and have refused power-- associating power, as many of them do, with control, force, corruption. But, refusing power, they refuse responsibility as well. They distort the true nature of scholarship by exalting it as an end in itself, rather than as the means that it is. So doing, they render humanistic scholarship barren.

Professional associations, learned societies, ^{graduate departments} and ^{can} remedy this by breaking the often-automatic connection of mature scholarship with university teaching. Thousands of Ph.D.s trained to research are, after all, unable to earn their living as teachers. Carefully considering ways to help the growing number of scholars outside the enclave, will both aid this homeless younger generation of scholars, and begin to restore to

humanism its vital association with actual living. Besides abandoning the notion that true scholarship can flourish only in the university, humanistic associations can reject the mirage of scholarly neutrality. While they uphold the standard of attempted objectivity, they must acknowledge that the objectivity is only attempted, not realized, and that the end-product exists in the impurities of the "real world." Learned societies and associations can further strengthen scholarship by beginning to evaluate journals by quality, and by stressing other factors besides prolific scholarship in employment and tenure decisions.² A crammed vita does not demonstrate worthwhile thought any more than a man's siring of seven children proves him to be a good father. John Kennedy once remarked that he hoped to "reopen the channels of communication between the world of thought and the seat of power."³ Perhaps, even at this late date, humanists can begin to strive towards the same necessary goal.

The world of thought suffers from its isolation from the seat of power, just as much as the world suffers from the loss of thought. Graduate study and advanced scholarship, by confining men to the intricacies of one discipline or one subspeciality, narrow men decisively if they will not be warned of the danger. The cloistered state of humanists increases the likelihood of such narrowness. How can humanists set themselves up as critics of society knowing as little as they do of the workings of society?

One major factor in the separation of professional humanism from the society which it professes to serve is the confused rationale underlying graduate education and the promotion of scholarship. The necessary break with university teaching seemingly violates the very purpose of the doctoral program. Is not that program designed to produce college and university teachers? The candid and the historically aware will answer, "No." While some graduate programs disguise the economic bases of the teaching assistantship with pieties about its being an apprenticeship, and while a few programs include one or two courses on teaching, the vast bulk of the Ph.D. program nevertheless concerns itself with research and the preparation of research. University rhetoric about maintaining the two functions of teaching and research, as well as economic convenience, hide the real, the actual, function of graduate education--the production of scholars.

Cannot scholars find other means of maintaining their bodily existence than the job of university teaching? The association of teaching with the advancement of learning dates from the beginnings of the modern American university, and thus is barely a hundred years old.⁴ Before Johns Hopkins and Chicago revolutionized American higher education, avocational scholars dominated the learned societies. The period between the end of the Civil War and the end of World War I saw the institutionalizing of scholarship in the university, and the end of the avocational tradition. While the American avocational tradition

never especially distinguished itself, its British counterpart produced the work of Charles Darwin, Edward Gibbon, David Hume, David Ricardo, and the Mills.⁵ When Johns Hopkins, the University of Chicago, and other universities opened in the last third of the nineteenth century, they adopted an American version of the German research university.

University-connected scholars ousted avocational ones from the learned societies, and teachers from the universities. Thus, the current model for the doctoral

program and for university faculty is a relatively recent one, and hardly an eternal norm. Scholars have before now earned their living outside the academy, and they must again. In fact, a study of Ph.D. job satisfaction--both within and outside the academy--asserts that Ph.D.s with administrative positions are the happiest of all, not faculty members.⁶ If the skills of the Ph.D. prove valuable to a corporation, if his knowledge proves valuable, his scholarship may well receive encouragement under the heading of "Research and Development." Corporations may well adapt themselves, as the university has, to flexible time schedules and job arrangements, if they are persuaded of the value of the scholarship to them. (Lest the word "corporation" cause offense, let me remind you that the university is a non-profit, incorporated business, and, as such, belongs in the non-profit sector of the business community. The university is a business.) Outside the corporations, humanists could incorporate themselves, as consultants. Some historians have already done this. What has been can be again, but it will take imagination and a little courage. It will not happen by itself.

Those who rationalize graduate admissions on the grounds that graduate education, deprived of employment potential, has become a sort of higher version of liberal education, will object to this pandering to the lust for utility. Liberal education, the cultivation of the mind, rejects such base ends, or so they say. In reality, such a classic defense of "knowledge its own end" as Newman's The Idea of a University clearly unites liberal education with professional vocation. For Newman, the university was the incubator for men of the world, not for cloistered academics. He does not deny the utility of the disciplined mind, the healthy intellect nourished by a liberal or philosophical education, but only that the goodness of such a mind rests entirely upon utility. The health of the mind, like the health of the body, is a good unto itself, but that mind, like that body, is meant to see use. As he says, "that training of the intellect, which is best for the individual himself, best enables him to discharge his duties to society. . . . If then a practical end must be assigned to a University course, I say it is that of training good members of society. Its art is the art of social life, and its end is fitness for the world."⁷ Many will enter graduate school now without illusions about eventual employment in teaching, solely for the love of the subject. If graduate education is truly liberal, or --more likely--if their own minds resist its narrowness, they will be most fit for leadership positions in society.

A last cry against alternative employment in the "real world" will arise. Graduate education, we are told, is our only sanctuary from the hounds of vocationalism now rending higher education. Graduate

students should pursue scholarship without a thought of vocation . Otherwise, the house of intellect will be "to let." The lie behind this curious position is that present and past graduate students did not expect an accompanying vocation. This is simply not true.

A further objection arises when one considers the debased meaning this argument gives to the once-honored word "vocation." As Newman knew, "life is for action," and the union of action with contemplation, thought with deed, that lies implicit in an intellectual training given some vocational focus, will result in an integrated life, a true "vocation" or calling--too often missing from our society, and the root cause of many ills.

Scholarship has real value when it receives application, when it breeds action which is intelligent, measured, and forceful. Whether in their private or public lives, men must act, and is it not better that their action be guided by thought and knowledge than by ignorance? Humanistic scholarship is value-laden, and is forever perceiving or judging by way of values. Its real contribution is not often new discovery, but the elaboration of a method, the understanding of relations. Rejecting the notion that mere accumulation of facts and details educated the mind, Newman saw the cultivated mind as supremely glorious and fit for action because it perceived relationships,

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it ordered reality into better and worse, higher and lower, important and trivial. Humanistic scholarship, like Newman's philosophical education, ought to make the student's mind liberal, or free, to enable him "to see things as they are, to go right to the point, to disentangle a skein of thought, to detect what is sophistical, and to discard what is irrelevant."⁸ When it does not do so, when scholars frenziedly publish in order to get or keep jobs, humanistic scholarship betrays its function. Scholarship has become a private and debased language, isolated from any thought of eventual application to man's life. As T.S. Eliot wrote forty years ago, "we write for our friends--most of whom are also writers--or for our pupils--most of whom are going to be writers; or we aim at a hypothetical popular audience which we do not know and which perhaps does not exist. The result, in any case, is apt to be a refined provincial crudity."⁹ Much humanistic scholarship, in its self-conceit and in its arrogant ignorance of other sides of life, deserves this indictment. Barricaded within the academy, humanists deplore the ignorance and barbarism of the world outside, forgetting that they have done nothing to stem that ignorance, that barbarity. They may have washed their hands of it, but that is no guarantee of innocence, only of irresponsibility. As the contemplators of man, humanists betray the rest of the world to the power-mad if they decline to civilize the world's work. If they remain a private society and talk only to themselves, that betrayal continues.

The learned societies once encouraged the scholarship of avocational scholars. They can do so again. In addition, they can show their care for scholarship by urging colleges and universities to pressure job

candidates and faculty up for tenure less in the matter of publication. Four-year liberal arts colleges, many universities, and certainly community colleges may garner a little prestige by hiring prolific scholars, but they harm their own interests in the long run. Only a very few research universities really need researchers, and even they should ease on the pressure. Perhaps this could be the beginning of the end for "publish or perish." In addition, professional associations can rank journals by approximate quality, reserving serious attention only to those journals which time and again prove their editorial excellence. From 1960 to 1975 the number of journals accepting scholarship in English studies tripled, rising 192%.¹⁰ Is this advancement of knowledge--private knowledge--or the accumulation of waste paper designed to nail down employment? Submissions surely should be open (the new policy of anonymous submission adopted by PMLA provides an excellent model), but journals should be excellent as well. The two ends are not incompatible, if the production of scholarship is a measured, rather than a frenzied, process, designed to advance knowledge, and not a career.

The job crisis that humanities Ph.D.s face will force learned societies eventually to come to grips with these central questions: are the ends we so value identical with our means of attaining them? Are there not other means to those ends? And, is not the price being paid too great for us to persist in our present course?

FOOTNOTES

¹ For an extensive discussion of "value-free" scholarship, see Harland G. Bloland, and Sue M. Bioland, American Learned Societies in Transition, publication of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974).

² Michael West advocates the ranking of journals by quality in his excellent "Evaluating Journals in English Studies," College English (April 1980): 903-923.

³ From an address to the National Press Club in January 1960. Quoted in The Heir Apparent: Robert Kennedy and the Struggle for Power by William Shannon (New York: Macmillan, 1967; London: Collier-Macmillan, 1967), 289.

⁴ See The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1860-1920 ed. by Alexander Oleson and John Voss (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), especially the "Introduction" by the editors, "The Order of Learning in the United States: The Ascendancy of the University" by Edward Shils, and "University Identity: The Teaching and Research Functions" by Hugh Hawkins.

⁵ Oleson and Voss, "Introduction," Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1860-1920, 20.

⁶ Lewis C. Solmon, "Ph.D.s and Non-Academic Careers: Are There Good Jobs?" abstracted in Communicator, XII (September 1979): 1-3. Full report available in Current Issues in Higher Education 7 (1979).

⁷ John Henry Cardinal Newman, The Idea of a University, ed. by Charles Frederick Harrold (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1947), 156-157.

⁸ Newman, 157.

⁹ T.S. Eliot, The Idea of a Christian Society (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), 38.

¹⁰ West, 909. He is reporting the statistics from Scholarly Communication: The Report of the National Enquiry (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).